

## Gordon Rogers

### The Early Years



There is a hard frost on this war time evening at the Scouts Hut in Longfield Road, Tring. Rogers is embroiled in a game of bulldog, when through the door walks Father Frank with a face like thunder. I am required to return home immediately since the police have arrived making enquiries into certain explosions that have occurred in the area. I am led into the dining room to be confronted by a burly police sergeant, there is a roaring coal fire and I am told that it has come to the sergeant's knowledge that I have been involved, with other boys, in the letting off of explosives. I think I have always realised that when confronted with a situation that is impossible

to defend the best way out is to put your arms up in surrender. This I did and when asked if I had any explosives in the house, immediately confessed. I went to the attic and produced a biscuit tin (one of the old tins with a capacity of about one cubic foot), full of gelignite. On taking off the lid the sergeant became seriously agitated and told me I could have blown up the whole street. Taking up a fistful I threw it on the fire and explained that a detonator was needed to cause an explosion.

My interest in explosives had been kindled by Strain, son of the Vicar of Aldbury and, at 13,1 a year older than me. He would manage to purloin a few items from the lab at Berkhamstead School and understood what you needed to do to get a bang. We then became ambitious to make larger bangs and it was fortuitous that the army held regular exercises at Ivinghoe Beacon, just a couple of miles from Aldbury. Scanning of the ranges following an exercise produced a variety of munitions. The most common find was unexpended 303 ammunition, but there were regular finds of unexploded mortars. If a mortar had not exploded the first thing to establish was whether it was of the high explosive or smoke variety. If smoke type it could be handled with compulsion; if high explosive it needed to be touched most gingerly and the detonator carefully removed. Charlie frightened me to death one day when the detonator on the mortar he was handling would not budge and he started knocking the side of the detonator with a stone in an endeavour to free it !

Bazookas were an occasional find and we had a supply of safety pins so that they could be transported, tied to the frame of the bicycle, so that they could not explode. The most exciting find was a Bren Machine Gun with a sizeable quantity of ammunition.

Needless to say the Vicarage at Aldbury became a very well equipped arsenal.